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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: KING MOHAMMED VI'S FIRST TEN YEARS: SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC ADVANCES OUTPACE DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

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Classified By: Charge d' Affaires, a.i., Robert P. Jackson for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: King Mohammed VI has successfully advanced social and economic reforms during the first ten years of his reign, but he has not done as much to promote structural democratic change in Morocco. The King can be credited with implementing many significant reforms in human rights, women's rights, freedoms of speech and the press, education, infrastructure, and the economy that have positively impacted the daily lives of Moroccans. Reforms have also been made in the political realm, particularly in the area of election transparency, but in the Mission's view much-needed structural changes have been addressed only symbolically. Democratic institutions, like Parliament and the judiciary, remain weak and underdeveloped, while the Palace continues to dominate political processes. Nonetheless, the USG can be proud of the role it has played in the reforms of the last ten years. End Summary.

Huge Social Reforms

12. (U) When King Mohammed VI of Morocco succeeded his father in July 1999, he made several gestures signaling the beginning of a more progressive era that would be focused on internal reforms. In his first speech, the new King defended women's rights and also spoke out against the poverty, institutionalized injustice, and corruption that characterized Moroccan society. He called for a new concept of authority based on accountability, human rights, and individual freedom. The tenth anniversary of King Mohammed VI's accession to the throne is a suitable time to consider progress on these Royal initiatives.

13. (U) Prominent among the reforms of the past decade been has been the promotion and strengthening of human rights. The King created the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) in 2004 to identify past human rights abuses from the repressive period in the 1970s and 1980s known as the &Years of Lead,8 compensate victims, and propose new laws closing legal loopholes in order to ensure that such abuses are not repeated. The IER was reinforced by the prerogatives of the Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH), set up in 1990 and reinvigorated in 2001, to consolidate human rights and reconcile Moroccan society with its past.

14. (U) King Mohammed VI made the promotion of women's rights another cornerstone of his efforts to build a modern and democratic society. Early in his reign, he announced the reform of the Family Code, known as the Moudawana, in order to establish greater equality between husband and wife. Put

into effect in 2003, it created obstacles to polygamy, raised the legal age of marriage to 18, and gave greater rights to women for divorce and financial support, among other reforms.

His wife, Princess Lalla Salma, has an unprecedented public profile, an anti-cancer foundation, and does not wear a veil.

In 2005, reform of the nationality code enabled Moroccan women married to foreigners to transmit Moroccan nationality to their children. Moroccan authorities, however, continue to make it difficult for families to name their children using Amazigh (Berber) names, citing the non-Arab/Muslim character of such names.

¶5. (U) Women's participation in the management of public affairs has also improved, and the representation of women in decision-making positions in Parliament as well as central and local government has increased significantly. Likewise, the role of women's community organizations has been strengthened. In the religious realm, Morocco has trained over 200 female preachers (&mourchidats8) whose mission is to act as spiritual counselors, raise female awareness of their rights, and fight against extremism. Owing to initial success, Morocco's Ministry of Islamic Affairs currently trains approximately 50 &mourchidats8 annually, and plans to expand the program.

¶6. (U) King Mohammed VI,s rule has created an overall improved climate for free speech and press when compared to the 38 years of his father's reign, but there are occasional setbacks. Leading periodicals, newspapers, and news programs increasingly challenge what have traditionally been considered the three &taboo8 topics or red lines: the inviolability of the monarchy, the primacy of Islam in Moroccan society, and the territorial integrity of Morocco, i.e., the acceptance of Western Sahara as an integral part of Morocco. However, by Western standards, there remains much

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work to be done. In the past two years, increasingly exorbitant fines have been levied on journalists as the result of flimsy defamation suits, and several bloggers were sentenced to jail, albeit for brief terms. Government authorities also have confiscated publications. In July 2009, for example, all copies of two prominent weekly news magazines were seized to prevent dissemination of an opinion poll on the King's performance, the outcome of which, incidentally, showed that he enjoyed overwhelming support.

¶7. (U) The National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), launched by the King in 2005, has been a landmark program designed to speed up socioeconomic development and balance regional inequalities by reintegrating the most marginalized members of society. INDH has implemented several large infrastructure projects, building or upgrading harbors, airports, and road and rail networks, as well as several sectoral strategies, including overhaul of the tourism and agricultural sectors. Rural electrification in Morocco went from 39 percent in 1999 to 98 percent in 2009.

¶8. (U) In 2001, the King called Morocco's many slums a source of social frustration, exclusion, and delinquency, warning that their continued existence was a threat to social cohesion and a contributor to extremism. The program &Cities Without Slums8 was launched to replace slum dwellings with decent housing for the estimated five million Moroccans living in squalor, and to combat the proliferation of new slums.

¶9. (U) The INDH also promotes the rights of the disabled, estimated at about five percent of Morocco's population, by revising laws and striving to raise awareness of the need for disabled access and incorporation into mainstream education, health, and transport systems, as well as housing planning.

¶10. (U) The 2004 labor code reform brought Moroccan legislation up to international standards, increasing work flexibility and simplifying labor laws. Health care reforms

in the same year increased basic health care insurance and accessibility to care in rural areas. The changes also raised hospital hygiene and emergency treatment standards, while instituting some anti-corruption measures in the health care system.

¶11. (U) Educational reform, although launched by the late King Hassan II at the end of his reign, has proven to be difficult for King Mohammed VI to advance. There have been some successes: over the last nine years, enrollment in primary school has increased from 52 to 92 percent; in middle school from 18 to 32 percent; and in secondary school from 6 to 15 percent, but reform expectations have not been met.

¶12. (U) Although education has become more accessible and the gender gap among school children has decreased, Morocco still faces high illiteracy rates (around 50 percent for the country as a whole) and low rates of secondary school and university enrollment. High dropout and repetition rates suggest internal inefficiency and poor educational quality. Geographic disparities exist at all educational levels. Moroccan authorities have attempted to address cultural and linguistic diversity with the introduction of Amazigh-language courses in certain schools, although the courses are not standard offerings.

and Considerable Economic Strides Forward

¶13. (U) Morocco's economy has witnessed steady growth, liberalization, and diversification during Mohammed VI's reign. GDP growth averaged 3.8 percent for the first half of the 10-year period, and it accelerated to 4.8 percent from 2004 through 2008. GDP is expected to grow over 5 percent in ¶2009. Agriculture's share of the GDP has fallen from 20 percent in 1998 to about 16 percent today, while service sectors have concomitantly grown in importance. Through national strategies of industrial production, tourism development, outsourcing, green energy production, and shipping, among others, the country has sought to position itself better in the global economy. It is as still too early to judge whether these multi-year strategies have had the desired effect.

¶14. (U) Morocco has also sought to strengthen and modernize its public finance system and the private sector. The Bank Al-Maghrib has become a more modern and independent central bank. The GOM's public finances have drawn on strengthened

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tax collection practices to achieve an average deficit of less than two percent of GDP, even finishing 2007 and 2008 in surplus. As a result, Morocco's total public debt has declined from over 60 percent of GDP to about 50 percent. The country has also pursued a policy of full or partial privatization of many state-owned enterprises, resulting in increased government revenue and sectoral efficiency.

¶15. (SBU) The effect of the broad range of economic and development policies is visible, literally, on the landscape, where construction is booming. Furthermore, according to official statistics, unemployment has dropped from 14 percent in 1999 to 9.5 percent by 2009, while average per capita income has risen by approximately five percent in real terms over that period. Economic benefits are unequally distributed, however, and improving the standard of living of the poorer segments of society remains a critical concern, both to avoid social unrest and to reduce the economic burden of costly policies such as general subsidies for food and fuel.

But Structural Political Reform Creeps Along

¶16. (U) International observers considered Morocco's 2007 legislative elections and 2009 local elections generally free and fair, with only isolated irregularities reported. High illiteracy rates in the country, as well as vote-buying in some areas, remain challenges to further development of the electoral system and participatory democracy. Many political parties have, with the encouragement of King Mohammed VI, become more internally democratic and transparent. A vibrant NGO sector helps promote an understanding of democratic processes and the crucial roles citizens play in elections. Nonetheless, voter turnout was estimated at 37 percent in the 2007 elections and 51 percent in the 2009 local elections.

¶17. (C) The current system of national, regional, and local government developed under the late King Hassan II in an era when the monarchy was concerned with consolidating its power in Moroccan society. The system is designed in such a way that political parties expend much of their energy competing with one other for ministerial posts and royal favor. This leaves the Palace in a dominant position, often manipulating political parties to ensure that no one becomes too strong or threatens Palace domination. The largest political parties with long institutional histories, such as Istiqlal (Independence) and the Political Union of Socialist Forces (USFP), have been discredited by decades of participation in the corrupt and tightly controlled electoral games fabricated and managed by the late King Hassan II. In such a system, structural political changes come slowly and only at Palace impetus.

¶18. (C) By the time King Mohammed VI inherited the throne, this gilded cage party system had largely co-opted all of the major political parties, completing consolidation of the Palace's power base. Ironically, because this patriarchal system has been structurally and psychologically institutionalized over the years, it is poorly equipped to implement the political reforms now being called for by civil society and political leaders. These include creating a system of checks and balances between branches of government and the Palace, strengthening the powers of the Prime Minister and other Ministers, ensuring judicial independence, fighting corruption at all levels of government, recasting the redundant role of the weak upper house of Parliament, and devolving greater political powers to the regions. It may be that the King recognizes the need to advance these reforms: among the national priorities he mentioned in his July 30 Throne Day speech were the need for everyone to respect the rule of law, judicial reform, and advanced regionalization.

Comment

¶19. (C) The Mission believes that, in order to have a trusted political party ally in promoting political reform, the King asked his former Secretary of State and close friend Fouad Ali El Himma to form a party. As a result, El Himma founded the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM); in less than one year, it has become the most influential political party in the country. The PAM fared very well in the June 2009 municipal elections, and is predicted to do similarly well in the next legislative elections, scheduled to be held in 2012, perhaps even winning a clear majority of

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seats in Parliament. If this occurs, it is likely that the King would nominate El Himma to be Prime Minister, putting him in a position to initiate greater structural reform in the political arena and reconfigure power relations among the Palace, national legislature, and regional and local government.

¶20. (C) The first decade of Mohammed VI's reign has been an unambiguous success in many social and economic spheres, and we anticipate that these trends will continue. Debate continues, however, on the pace of democratic reforms.

However, we think most Moroccans would agree that the King is sincere in his stated desire to see Morocco become a more democratic state. Toward this end, the King appears to be preparing the country for structural political and possibly constitutional reform by fostering the PAM as a steward for change.

¶21. (C) The USG can be proud of the role it has played in the reforms of the last ten years. USAID has been at the heart of reforms in education, local governance, women's rights and political participation. It has strengthened agriculture and improved the business and investment climates. The Free Trade Agreement has changed the way Moroccans think about commerce, and it has certainly attracted investors to Morocco. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Peace Corps have both encouraged a range of reforms and enhanced development. The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) has supported the INDH and provided the model for Morocco's agricultural reforms and changes in the fishing and crafts industries. The Embassy and the Consulate General have pushed and continued to push for additional democratization and human rights, as we combat corruption, extremism, illiteracy, narcotics, and trafficking in persons. Looking ahead, our Mission Strategic Plan and Country Assistance Strategy are designed to aid youth and women in particular, but even with the MCA, USAID, MEPI, Peace Corps, other USG, and other donors, programs, Morocco still has a long way to go to meet the Millennium Development Goals and to become a constitutional monarchy. End comment.

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